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HISTORICAL SKETCH

OF THE

THIRD ARMY CORPS

A SOUVENIR FROM THE

SURVIVORS AT WASHINGTON TO THEIR
VISITING COMRADES AT THE THIRTY-
SIXTH NATIONAL ENCAMPMENT OF
THE GRAND ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC.

By Charles F. Benjamin.

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172

Historical Sketch of the Third Army Corps.

The Third Army Corps was formed March 8, 1862, by President Lincoln, as Commander-in-Chief, from the divisions of Heintzelman, Porter and Hooker, and the first-named, as senior officer of the corps, assigned to its command. He was succeeded as division commander by General Hamilton, who shortly gave place to General Kearny, and eventually became a distinguished officer in the western armies.

Porter's division never actually served with the corps, and after the battle of Williamsburg, May 5, 1862, was formally detached from it by General McClellan, to become part of a provisional corps under Porter himself. The corps, therefore, consisted of the divisions of Hooker and Kearny till the close of the Second Bull Run campaign, when Kearny being killed and Hooker transferred to the command of another corps, General Birney succeeded Kearny and Hooker was succeeded by General Sickles. Prior to the Fredericksburg campaign, in the early winter of 1862, a small division under General Whipple was added to the corps, and Heintzelman was replaced by General Stoneman as corps commander. After that campaign, Stoneman was transferred to the command of the newly-formed cavalry corps, and succeeded by General

Sickles, whose division was then placed under General Berry.

In the Chancellorsville campaign, May, 1863, Berry was killed and Whipple mortally wounded, and his division, except two regiments, sent elsewhere, was distributed between the First Division, under Birney, and the Second Division, under General Humphreys, the successor of Berry.

In the Gettysburg campaign, Sickles was disabled for further field service by a severe wound, and was succeeded by General French, who had brought to the corps a new Third Division, which passed to the command of General Carr. Humphreys was detached to higher duty, and General Mott succeeded him in command of the Second Division.

Under French, the corps made the two short campaigns of the Rappahannock and of Mine Run, in the late autumn of 1863, and on March 23, 1864, was discontinued by order of President Lincoln, after an existence of two years. The Third Division was separated from the two original divisions, which then became the Third and Fourth Divisions of the Second Army Corps; but they retained their own corps badge and ensigns. They were consolidated into one division under Birney soon after the opening of the Wilderness campaign in May, 1864, and so they remained till the disbandment of the Army of the Potomac near the end of June, 1865. Mott becoming and remaining the commander of the single division upon the transfer of Birney to a higher command in the summer of 1864.

Williamsburg was the first battle of the corps, and the date of that battle, May 5th, has been accepted by the survivors of the corps as its own anniversary. The composition of the corps, personally commanded by Brig. Gen. Samuel P. Heintzelman, in that battle, was as follows:

FIRST DIVISION.—Brig. Gen. Fitz John Porter; absent from the corps on detached service.

SECOND DIVISION.—Brig. Gen. Joseph Hooker.

First Brigade.—Brig. Gen. Cuvier Grover: 1st Mass., Col. Robert Cowdin; 11th Mass., Col. William Blaisdell; 2d N. H., Col. Gilman Marston; 26th Pa., Col. William F. Small.

Second Brigade.—Col. Nelson Taylor: 70th N. Y., Col. William Dwight, Jr.; 72d N. Y., Lieut. Col. Israel Moses; 73d N. Y., Col. William R. Brewster; 74th N. Y., Lieut. Col. Charles H. Burtis.

Third Brigade.—Brig. Gen. Francis E. Patterson: 5th N. J., Col. Samuel H. Starr; 6th N. J., Lieut. Col. John P. Van Leer (killed); 7th N. J., Lieut. Col. Ezra A. Carman; 8th N. J., Col. Adolphus J. Johnson.

Second Division Artillery.—Maj. Charles S. Wainwright: D, 1st N. Y., Capt. Thomas W. Osborn; 4th N. Y., Capt. James E. Smith; 6th N. Y., Capt. Walter M. Bramhall; H, 1st U. S., Capt. Charles H. Webber.

Division Loss.—Killed, 337; wounded, 908; missing, 330; total, 1,575.

THIRD DIVISION.—Brig. Gen. Philip Kearny.

First Brigade.—Brig. Gen. Charles D. Jameson: 87th N. Y., Col. Stephen A. Dodge; 57th Pa., Col. Charles T. Campbell; 63d Pa., Col. Alexander Hays; 105th Pa., Col. Amor A. McKnight.

Second Brigade.—Brig. Gen. David B. Birney: 3d Me., Col. Henry G. Staples; 4th Me., Col. Elijah Walker; 38th N. Y., Col. J. H. Hobart Ward; 40th N. Y., Col. Edward J. Riley.

Third Brigade.—Brig. Gen. Hiram G. Berry: 2d Mich., Col. Orlando M. Poe; 3d Mich., Col. Stephen G. Champlin; 5th Mich., Col. Henry D. Terry; 37th N. Y., Col. Samuel B. Hayman.

Third Division Artillery.—Captain James Thompson : B. 1st N. J., Capt. John E. Beam : E. 1st R. I., Capt. George E. Randolph : G. 2d U. S., Capt. James Thompson.

DIVISION LOSS.—Killed, 87 ; wounded, 315 ; missing, 17 ; total, 419.

The total loss of the two divisions of the corps was 1,994, out of a total loss of 2,234 in the five Union divisions engaged, and the severity of the battle fell chiefly upon the Second Division.

After its baptism of fire at Williamsburg, the corps, consisting still of the divisions of Hooker and Kearny, went through the other battles of the Peninsula campaign, including Fair Oaks, Oak Grove and Malvern Hill, and the closing engagements of the Second Bull Run campaign, including Groveton and Chantilly.

It was then placed in the defenses of Washington, in recognition of its war-worn condition, and was absent from the Antietam campaign.

In preparation for the campaign by way of the Rappahannock intended by General Burnside, the corps again took the field, and in the battle of Fredericksburg, December, 1862, its two old divisions were detached from the center, to support the operations of the left wing, under General Franklin. The corps was commanded by Stoneman, the divisions by Birney, Sickles and Whipple, the brigades of the First Division by Brigadier Generals John C. Robinson, J. H. Hobart Ward and Hiram G. Berry : those of the Second Division by Brigadier Generals Joseph B. Carr and Joseph W. Revere, and Col. George B. Hall ; and those of the Third Division by Brig. Gen. A. Sanders Piatt, and Col. Samuel S. Carroll. The corps loss was 145 killed, 832 wounded, and 364 missing ; total 1,341 out of a strength of some 13,000, of which 1,113 was in

the First Division. The total Union loss was 12,653 out of 113,000 on the field, so that the loss of the corps was about equal to the average for the whole army.

In the Chancellorsville campaign, May, 1863, the corps was at first a part of the left wing, under Sedgwick, below Fredericksburg, but was soon transferred to the right at Chancellorsville. In this campaign the corps was commanded by Sickles, the divisions by Birney, Berry and Whipple: the brigades of the First Division by Brigadier Generals Charles K. Graham and J. H. Hobart Ward, and Col. Samuel B. Hayman; those of the Second Division by Brigadier Generals Joseph B. Carr, Joseph W. Revere and Gershom Mott; and those of the Third Division by Colonels Emlen Franklin, Samuel M. Bowman and Hiram Berdan. Seven regimental commanders were killed or mortally wounded: namely, Colonels Stevens, 72d N. Y.; McKnight, 105th Pa.; Crowther, 110th Pa., and Lancaster, 115th Pa.; and Lieut. Cols. Sherlock, 5th Mich.; Chapin, 86th N. Y., and Kirkwood, 63d Pa. The losses of the corps were 377 killed, 2,642 wounded and 1,535 missing; total, 4,554, out of a total loss of 17,287 in the Union Army; almost double the average loss, in proportion to the strength of the corps.

In the Gettysburg campaign, the corps was commanded by General Sickles, and its organization was as follows:

FIRST DIVISION.—Maj. Gen. David B. Birney.

First Brigade.—Brig. Gen. Charles K. Graham: 57th, 63d, 68th, 105th, 114th, and 141st Pa.

Second Brigade.—Brig. Gen. J. H. Hobart Ward: 20th Ind., 3d and 4th Me., 86th and 124th N. Y., 99th Pa., 1st and 2d U. S. Sharpshooters.

Third Brigade.—Col. P. Regis De Trobriand:

17th Me., 3d and 5th Mich., 40th N. Y. and 110th Pa.

SECOND DIVISION.—Brig. Gen. Andrew A. Humphreys.

First Brigade.—Brig. Gen. Joseph B. Carr : 1st, 11th and 16th Mass., 12th N. H., 11th N. J., 26th and 84th Pa.

Second Brigade.—Col. William R. Brewster : 70th, 71st, 72d, 73d, 74th and 120th N. Y.

Third Brigade.—Col. George C. Burling : 2d N. H., 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th N. J., and 115th Pa.

CORPS ARTILLERY.—Capt. George E. Randolph : 2d N. J.; D, 1st N. Y.; 4th N. Y.; E, 1st R. I.; K, 4th U. S.

Colonels Wheeler, 20th Ind., and Ellis, 124th N. Y., were killed on the field, and Colonel Francine, 7th N. J., was mortally wounded, among the regimental commanders.

The corps loss was 585 killed, 3,029 wounded, and 597 missing; total 4,211, out of a total Union loss of 23,003: its loss being above the average in comparison with its strength, but not nearly so disproportionate as in the Chancellorsville campaign.

The loss of a leg at Gettysburg separated General Sickles from the corps. Under his successor, Gen. William H. French, the corps was engaged at Liberty Mills, Oct. 15th; Kelly's Ford, Nov. 7th, and Jones' Cross Roads, Nov. 27th, all in 1863, during the so-called Rappahannock and Mine Run campaigns. Its future operations were all performed as a part of the Second Army Corps, and embraced the battles of the Wilderness, Spottsylvania, North Anna, Cold Harbor, Petersburg, Deep Bottom, Ream's Station and Boydton Plank Road, in 1864; the final and successful attack on Petersburg, April 2, 1865: the fatal rout of the Confederate army at

Sailor's Creek, four days later, and the closing affair near Farmville, the next succeeding day, followed the day after by the surrender of General Lee. What then remained of the one-time Third Army Corps was thus constituted:

THIRD DIVISION, SECOND ARMY CORPS.—Brig. Gen. Gershom Mott.

First Brigade.—Brig. Gen. P. Regis De Trobriand: 20th Ind., 1st Me. Heavy Art'y (joined 1864), 40th, 73d, 86th and 124th N. Y.; 99th and 110th Pa.

Second Brigade.—Brig. Gen. Byron R. Pierce: 17th Me., 1st Mass. Heavy Art'y (joined 1864), 5th Mich., 93d N. Y. (joined 1864), 57th, 105th and 141st Pa.

Third Brigade.—Col. Robert McAllister: 11th Mass., 7th, 8th and 11th N. J., and 120th N. Y.

After the grand review at Washington in June, 1865, the division was disbanded, and its regiments sent home for discharge.

Of the 25 regiments in the two divisions originally constituting the corps, 20 were still with it at the time of its discontinuance, and some of the remaining five were with it by consolidation with the 20 already mentioned. Two of the four corps commanders, six of the seven commanders of the two divisions, and 11 of the 13 brigade commanders in those divisions, were original Third Corps men. Thus, during the two years of its separate existence, the corps was predominantly composed of officers, men and regiments who knew one another, and among whom and which a strong spirit of comradeship and a particular feeling of identity with the corps existed. This sentiment of long and close identification with the corps found expression, in the autumn of 1863, in the organization of the still-existing Third Army Corps Union, confined at

that time, by the necessities of military custom and discipline, to commissioned officers, but open to all ranks when all had returned to their civic equality.

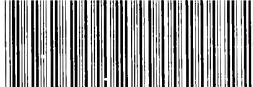
Upon the whole, the corps was fortunate in its battles. Williamsburg, the first of them, bore hardly upon the Second Division under Hooker, but the Union Army in the end possessed the field. At Fair Oaks, on the second day, the corps did its part handsomely in retrieving the disasters of the first day. At Oak Grove, June 25, 1862, and subsequently at Malvern Hill, the results put heart into the men of the corps, and so again when Hooker returned to Malvern Hill on the second of August and dislodged the enemy that had taken post at that strong position. To Hooker's early-won reputation as an intrepid leader, and the high state of efficiency into which he had brought his distantly-stationed division during the winter of 1861, are to be attributed much of the onerous work imposed upon that division while he commanded it.

At Groveton, and even at Chantilly, in Pope's campaign, the Third Corps was spared the scenes and feelings of disastrous defeat that finally overtook the campaign. The battle of Fredericksburg was the first black day for the corps, so far as its own operations were concerned. Its two old divisions and its little Third Division were separated from one another, and their scattered endeavors conformed to those of other commands, to which the principal efforts of the battle had been assigned: so that the corps shared in the general failure, and finally stole back to its camps, across the bridges by night, in a state of depression previously unknown to it. This experience was repeated in the final outcome at Chancellorsville, yet the fighting of the corps

itself was made in high spirit, and with an enemy supposed at the time to be in retreat. After the close of the battle of the second day at Gettysburg, Birney, who had succeeded the disabled Sickles in command of the corps, told the council of war at Meade's headquarters that the Third Corps was used up and not in condition for further operations; but in the end he voted to stay and fight it out, and estimated that the corps could put 9,000 effective men in line for the next day. His vote was sounder than his opinion, for Meade had so promptly and courageously stripped his lines to sustain the corps in the position wherein Longstreet had attacked it, and the Army of the Potomac had so fought altogether, in a fashion new to it, that the men of the Third Corps who remained lay down on the field, quite aware of the severity of the contest whereof they had been the center, but unsuspecting of the fears that were shaking the breasts of the great ones set over them. It is an interesting circumstance that Birney's estimate of the number he could still put in line was equal to that of any corps except the Second, a strong corps, strongly posted on Cemetery Ridge, and superior to that of four other of the seven infantry corps belonging to the army.

Gettysburg was the last great battle of the corps, and all of importance that followed it is part of the history of the Second Army Corps, already so well told by the late Francis A. Walker, its accomplished chief of staff.

The life and memory of the Third Army Corps are notably free from controversies such as have attached themselves to the history of some other parts of the Union Army, as well as to parts of the Confederate army. No internal dissension occurred to mar its fraternity then or thereafter,



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nor did any subject of contention arise between it and other organizations or their commanders. The controversy between Generals Meade and Sickles, over the advancement by the latter of the lines of the corps from its assigned position on the field of Gettysburg, was one personal to themselves: death and time have cancelled its bitterness, and in the end the incident will assume its true proportions among the really great events of the great battle, yielding nothing to disturb the fame of either of the illustrious disputants. Its final repose will leave the history of the dear old corps as serene as it is glorious, and the diamond badge will remain as a fitting emblem of men of the diamond standard.

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